

A STEADFAST HOPE

A SERMON

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“Be not moved away from the hope of the gospel.” Colossians 1:23

BECAUSE we do not hold the doctrine of legal responsibility before God, therefore it is we are charged with holding the atheistical doctrine of irresponsibility, and which charge, like all the rest of the charges brought against the people of God, is utterly false. Our law responsibility to God demanded of us perfection of obedience. Having failed in that, and, in addition to that failure, having committed positive sins against God, we thereby are made obnoxious unto eternal wrath; and there was a responsibility which Christ alone could take; Christ has taken that responsibility, and being brought to receive him as the end of the law, there our legal responsibility ceases. We are no longer responsible, there is nothing more to be responsible for. Does the law ask anything more? Does justice ask anything more? Does holiness ask anything more? Has not Jesus magnified the law, and established it? And do we thus, through faith, make void the law? Yea, we establish the law. And as we do not hold the doctrine of legal responsibility, so there is another doctrine which we do not hold; namely, that men are responsible to God for their eternal salvation. The word of God represents the Savior as being responsible for the salvation of men. He says, “Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold;” them I must die for. Something more than that. Them I must redeem. Something more than that. Them I must make a way for to come ultimately into heaven. Something more than that. “Them I must bring, and there shall be one-fold and one shepherd.” Therefore, we do not hold legal responsibility, and we do not hold that man is responsible for his own salvation; for how can we be responsible for that which is not committed unto us? And if my salvation be committed unto me, then I know what the result must be; for if Moses could not obtain an earthly Canaan because he rebelled by the way, how much less can we attain to the heights of eternal glory by anything we can do! We bless the Lord, therefore, that he has laid help upon one that is mighty; that Christ has carried out in his humiliation our law responsibility, and that in his exaltation he carries out his new covenant responsibility. But does it therefore follow, I say, that we hold the atheistical doctrine, for so I call it, of irresponsibility? Certainly not. The truths of the gospel, as so many talents, are committed unto us, and we profess to trade with those truths, we profess to trade with those talents, and we are responsible to God for the use we make of the truths of the gospel; we are responsible to God for the kind of profession we make of his name. If we make an unhallowed profession, a hypocritical profession, or a false

profession, then we shall at the last be dealt with according to the profession we make. So that we are thus responsible to God for the use we make of the truth which we profess, and for the profession which we make of his name. Every one of us must give an account of himself to God. It is under the feeling of this responsibility that the apostle said here, after enumerating mercy after mercy, blessing after blessing, belonging to the people of God, showing that all these shall come upon the persons to whom he is writing, if they continued in the faith grounded and settled, and were not moved away from the hope of the gospel. So, then, those men who are pointing us out as holding the doctrine of irresponsibility, I say it is our comfort to know that they are wrong, and that they misrepresent us; and so the sin lies not with us, who are degraded and lowered in the eyes of the public, but with those men that charge us with that which we, through mercy, stand clear of. We thus bless God for laying our legal responsibility upon One who was able to bear it; we bless our God that Jesus is the Surety of the new covenant. Am I to become joint surety with him? When two sureties are required, what is the reason of that? Why, because the persons to whom they are sureties are not satisfied with one; if they are satisfied with one, surely, they will not seek a second. And shall the Lord, after finding such a Surety for the safety of the people as Jesus is, then seek to the people themselves? What, seek to the man that needs a surety himself! The man who needs the surety himself to become surety for his own salvation! Why, this doctrine is as absurd, is as unreasonable, as it is untrue and unscriptural. I trust; therefore, we know where our responsibility was; Jesus has ended it; and that we know that he stands the Surety of the covenant, and he alone; and that we know also where our responsibility now is.

I will take, therefore, as far as the Lord shall enable me, a threefold view of the subject before us this morning. First, *here is the hope of the gospel*. Secondly, *steadfastness in that hope*; “Be not moved away from the hope of the gospel.” Thirdly, and lastly, *the sweet assurance of the Lord’s word that those in whose hearts the work of grace is begun never shall be moved away from this hope of the gospel*.

Now what is the hope of the gospel? Not to be moved away from implies that we must first be brought into it; for no man by nature has in his heart a gospel hope; a gospel hope is the gift of God. Just look at the several, before I enter into an analytical description of this hope, just look at the several characteristics of the gospel. How beautiful it is! First, it is called “the gospel of God;” and where should our hope be but in God? It is called “the gospel of Christ;” and where should our hope be but in Jesus Christ? It is called “the gospel of the grace of God;” and where should our hope be but in the grace of God? It is called “the gospel of the kingdom;” and where should our hope be, and what is the object we should seek, but the kingdom of God? And it is called “the gospel of salvation;” and where should our hope be but in this salvation? And it is called “the gospel of peace;” and where should our hope be but in that peace that the dear Savior has made? But let us come a little closely into this. First, then, the hope of the gospel is the hope of eternal life. “In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised,” said the apostle to Titus, “before the world began.” Now what is hope? Hope is made up, as it appears to me, of two elements, expectation and desire; or, if you please, desire and expectation. These are the two elements of hope, desire and expectation. You will see a difference between these two; these two qualities apart cannot be called hope; but put them together, they combine, they unite, and make up what is called hope. Hence, a man may, for instance, expect some heavy calamity to befall him; he may have some reason, perhaps, to expect that; but he does not desire it, and therefore it cannot be said that he hopes that such and such will take place. On the other hand, a man may desire some

great advantage, temporal advantage, which he expects never to attain, and therefore it cannot be said that he hopes for that advantage. But put the two together, expectation and desire, these two make up the hope; or to put the desire first; first, then, here is a sinner begins to feel a desire towards God, and begins to think to himself, What a happy people they must be that have God on their side, that have Jesus Christ on their side! How great is that death from which he delivers such! And that such have everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation. And such an one reflects very much in his own mind upon it, and thinks to himself, Well, if the Lord were on my side, should then have a friend that loveth at all times; I should then have a burden-bearer; I should then have one to whom I could tell each rising grief; I should then have one that would give me the best of counsels, that would guide me into the best of pastures, and that would take care of me with the best of care. But, says such an one, I cannot expect the Lord will ever look upon me; I cannot expect the Lord will ever have mercy upon me; I cannot expect that I, a poor outcast, forlorn, lost creature, shall ever become one of that happy number that have everlasting life, and that I shall form a part of that multitude no man can number, out of all kindreds, nation, and tongues. And thus, the desire comes first. And if you say to such a one, Well, have you any hope? he says, I am afraid to say I have any hope. Presently some scripture will come to encourage him, such as this, "I know the thoughts I think toward you, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." And he begins to see in the scripture his own character reflected: Well, he says, after all there is a liberality in the gospel, I can find nowhere else. I find there pardon is free, and justification is free, and salvation is free, and mercy is free, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin, and that Jesus Christ, after all, came into the world to save sinners; and I am but a sinner, I can't be more than a sinner, the worst character that ever lived could only be a sinner; and therefore, as he came to save sinners, why should not I hope? He thus begins to have a hope in Christ Jesus, and begins to see, for where there is this earnest desire, there is a turning to the Scriptures, and the mind by degrees becomes enlightened concerning what Jesus Christ has done, that he has swallowed up death in victory. And such an one says, Well, I really now feel I have an earnest desire to God, and an earnest desire that I might be one of his children and be found among his children. I feel rise in my mind now a kind of hope, when I look at God's mercy, when I look at his dear Son, what he has done, and when I look at sinners that have obtained mercy. You feel hope, that is the hope of the gospel, and we say to such little ones, Be not moved away from that little hope you have; the Lord enable you to take courage from the Scriptures, that he will not quench the smoking flax; he will not break the bruised reed. You feel you are a poor creature; a few feeble desires, and you are poor bruised creature, and yet you feel a living desire after the Lord, a desire that he would be at your side; and of course your desire extends the other way as well, that you have as much desire to be on his side as you have that he should be on your side. You have no desire to go on against him, but you have a desire to walk in his ways, and to cleave unto him, and to prize him. Now, then, such as have this desire, and are thus led to see what Christ has done, and to place their hope in him, these have a true hope, these are true Christians, and these Satan will labor hard to move away from the hope of the gospel. It is, then, the hope of eternal life, because, by what Jesus Christ has done, death is gone forever; death cannot return, he has so endured the penalty, that the penalty is gone forever. It is not as it was with the Jewish nation, and as it is with men; penalty upon penalty, penalty upon penalty, poured out upon sin after sin, sin after sin, and you don't know when the penalty is ended. But it is not so in Christ Jesus; their our sins were concentrated; there the penalty was concentrated; there the curse was concentrated; there the sword did its work, and did its work for ever; there the Savior put away

forever sin, by the sacrifice of himself. Here, then, is life and immortality brought to light by the gospel. What a blessed hope is this, then, this eternal life by Christ Jesus, the Lord on our side!

Second, it is called, “the hope of righteousness.” I have often thought that it is a very beautiful representation, “the hope of righteousness.” The man who knows most of the Savior’s righteousness will see most clearly the meaning of that scripture. What has the righteousness of Jesus Christ brought him to? It brought him out of the grave; it has brought him to heaven, brought him to a throne of glory, brought him to a fulness of joy, brought him into pleasures for evermore; that is where it has brought him to. And you are to hope for just the same. Plead his righteousness, mention his righteousness. And if your conscience sometimes reproach you, Satan reproach you, professors reproach you, and even some of your brethren accuse you, never mind; plead the Savior’s righteousness, for “there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” “I will go,” said one, “in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of your righteousness, even of your only.” Thus, then, here is the hope of eternal life; and it is the hope, as we have said, of righteousness, so that your desire will be unto that righteousness; and your expectation, humble but earnest expectation, will be found in that righteousness. The inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fades not away. What am I hoping for? Why, for the ultimate prize. It enters within the veil, whither Jesus our forerunner is for us entered, being made a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. The poet might well say,

“What a sweet, exalted song
Shall rend the vaulted shies,
When, shouting grace, the blood-washed throng
Shall see the top-stone rise!”

What grace it is to give us this eternal life! “A good hope through grace.” What grace it was to provide for us this eternal righteousness! and what grace it was that has so arranged matters for us, that here is in these things’ eternal certainty! Such, then, is the hope of the gospel. But there is one more item I perhaps had better name, and that is, that this hope of the gospel has the promise, and that is of no small importance, of the life that now is, as well as of the life which is to come. And some of us who have lived many years in this world, I think more and more, though we have not now so long to live as we had, more and more appreciate that part of the word, that “godliness has the promise of the life that now is.” You young people, little do you think what providential care you need over you, to keep you from ruin, to keep you from destruction, to keep you from calamities; you little think you slumber sometimes in the midst of what appears to you to be the highest temporal good. So deceitful are appearances, that God alone can penetrate appearances, see into realities, preserve and guide us right, and bring us safe at last. God help us, then, of all ages, young and old, to commit our way unto the Lord in this as well as in every other respect; for we do need his care in this, and hundreds of you have much, very much, to praise the Lord for in this respect, the wonderful care he has taken of you. Such, then, is the hope of the gospel, not only all that the righteousness of Jesus Christ can bring us to, not only the certainty, but it has the promise of this life as well, that the Lord will take care of such, and will watch over them, and bring them safe at last.

I now notice the steadfastness of this hope. “Be not moved away from the hope of the gospel.” There are some things essential for us to do in order to be saved; yet salvation is not conditional,

and yet if we do not do these things we shall be lost; some things that we must do, and continue to do them unto the end, or else we shall be lost; and yet salvation is not conditional, there is final salvation. "Work out your own salvation." I think salvation there, while it means preservation, I will now, as I am speaking of it now, take it to mean eternal glory; for eternal glory is sometimes called salvation; "receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls;" "salvation ready to be revealed." So that you are to be in eternal glory all that salvation can make you. You are to continue to attend to that salvation all your days. And how are you to work out your final salvation? In the way the word of God directs. "Take heed to yourself;" see that you are right in your hope, and in your faith, and in your prayers, and in your religion. "Examine yourself, whether you be in the faith;" and then take heed to the doctrines that you hold and continue in them; "in so doing you shall save yourself." Work out your final salvation. The apostle says, "I keep under my body," upon this very subject, "and bring it into subjection," lest by any means, when "I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." What does the apostle mean there? Finally lost? To all intents and purposes, that is his meaning. I am aware Beza renders it, "Lest I should be reprov'd," but it will bear no such translation; no, the apostle means this, to be cast into hell; he means eternally lost; he means everything that is awful; he means as awful an end and destiny as any man can come to. The Greek word *adokimos*, there translated "castaway," is the same word that in the first chapter of the Romans is translated "reprobate:" "Gave them over to a reprobate mind;" and to come to that reprobate mind the apostle dreaded. The same word, in the sixth of the Hebrews, is translated "rejected:" "That which bears thorns and briers is rejected and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned." Now, then, lest I should come to this awful end I keep my body in subjection; I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. But before I open up what appears to me to be the meaning, a meaning in entire harmony with the freeness and final certainty of the salvation of the soul, just observe there were two things of which the apostle was convinced. One was that which he wrote here to the Colossians, "If you continue in the faith, and be not moved from the hope of the gospel;" he knew that if he did not do this, continue in the faith, he should be a castaway. The second thing he well knew, as well as any man ever did know or ever can know, was that while, if he did not do this, namely, continue in the faith, he could not be saved, that on the other hand he would be as sure not to do this as that he existed, if he who had begun the good work did not carry it on; if God did not work in him to will and to do of his good pleasure; if God did not abide by him and keep working, he would be as sure not to do that that was essential to his salvation as that he existed. "I bring under my body," the body of sin. Some take that bringing under the body and keeping it in subjection in the moral sense. It has a moral meaning, no question about it. Let it have all its moral force as much as you like; but if we stop there, we stop at that which any natural man may do. We will include that; let that go for a part of the meaning; but we must go beyond it. And the idea is this: First, I have an unbelieving heart, and if grace does not enable me to overcome that unbelief of my heart, and continue in the belief of the truth, to continue in the belief of an everlasting covenant, to continue in the belief of what I now know to be the truth, if I do not continue in this, then what should I be at the last? Why, it would prove my mind to be a reprobate mind. The meaning of the Greek word *adokimos*, I repeat it, is that of dross metal; that when a metal is purified there is the dross, and the apostle would look at himself, if he gave up the faith, ceased to believe, then he would be dross, and cast away as dross. You see the apostle's idea. And therefore, at the last he said, "I have kept the faith;" but then he well new grace had kept him in the faith. Now, then, he thus kept under this unbelief, and continued in the faith. Secondly, love. I have an enmity, as though he should say, in my nature that hates God in many of his dealings

with me. And hence our rebellions, hence our cursing the day of our birth, as though our very existence, notwithstanding our union to God, were a curse to us. And therefore, I need grace to enable me to keep down my enmity and rebellion against God, and to continue in his love. "Continue you in my love," So I must continue in the faith and in God's love, for if I go out of faith into unbelief, and out of love into enmity, then at last I shall be dross, and not that which Job describes when he says, "When he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

I will name only one more respect, and that is decision. I must not give way to the compromising turnings and twisting and fashions of the professing world. I must be content to be called a bigot, bitter spirited, high doctrine, dangerous, and all the evil names they can call me. I must still remain decided, for woe is me if I admit another gospel; woe is me if I preach another Jesus; woe is me if I go out of the spirit of gospel decision into the compromising spirit of the world; I should then be mere dross, and should be cast away. Now the apostle well knew he never could be cast away unless he became an unbeliever, unless he became an enemy, which he once was, unless he had become a waverer, and turned and twisted about, halted between two opinions. He knew very well if he ceased to be a believer, and a lover of Jesus, and to be decided, he should at the last be dealt with as Rahab and those with her would have been if they had not tarried in the house; but they continued, and were found in the house when the judgment came, and therefore were saved. If Noah and his family do not continue in the ark, if they are not found in the ark when the flood is engulfing a world, they must be lost. And if the Israelites be not found within the rules of the paschal lamb, with the sprinkled blood, when the angel of death comes, then the sword will cut them down. So you, my hearer, you that are a true Christian, if it were possible, and I adore the Lord God of our salvation it is not possible, still it is a good heart-searching exercise, if it were possible for you to go out of the faith and become an disbeliever, out of the love of the truth, and become a hater of the truth, and out of decision, and become a compromiser, a world-pleasing professor, if death overtake you in that state, why, the very fact of your dying would prove you never were a real child of God. "They went out from us because they were not of us; for if they had been of us, then doubtless would have continued with us." So, then, have I made the meaning clear? First, then, I have preached to others, that will not save me; I have been the means of saving others, that will not save me; I have been the means of sending others to heaven happy and triumphant, that will not save me; for if I do not keep my body of sin under, and continue in the faith, and in love, and in decision, and in those practical sympathies with the cause of God and the poor of the Lord's people that shall not authorize the Savior to include me at the last among the happy number, "I was an hungered, and you gave me meat; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came unto me. Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," if I could go out of all this, and become the reverse of all this, that would give proof that I had gifts but not grace; that I have been as the sounding brass and the tinkling cymbal; and while I have thus preached to others I myself at the last become an unbeliever, and enemy, undecided, wavering, tossed to and fro, and should be found at last, not in Zion's order, but should be found among the Babylonians, in confusion, and must be destroyed with them that shall be destroyed. No, my hearer, a man may have gifts, and preach for a long time, and at the same time himself be a stranger in his own soul to the things he preaches to others. And now, friends, can you understand me? First, that the Lord has brought us into this faith, and hope, and love, and decision; second, that as the Lord has brought us (shall I use the phrase?) into the ark, unless we are found there when the flood comes, then we cannot escape; but the Lord's

grace will enable us to continue. But here is another word here, "If you continue grounded and settled!" What a nice thing it is to be settled down! Say some, Do you ever feel as the apostle felt? Yes, I do; I feel if I could give up the faith, that would at once prove that I was dross, and not real gold; and if I could eat and drink with the drunken, become fleshly conceited, and begin to beat the poor handmaids and servants of the Lord's people, then he whom I profess to serve would come and cut me in sunder, and appoint my portion with the hypocrites. If I could become a compromiser, and could compromise my high credentials, heaven's credentials, and so compromise the welfare of the souls of men and the honor of the King of kings, then I should be called to order, and the heaviest curse would fall upon my guilty head. Therefore, lest I should come to such an awful end, I do, through grace keep under this unbelief, and continue in the faith; I do, through grace, keep under the enmity, and continue in love; I do, through grace, keep under my shifting, turn-again, turn-again, compromising nature, and stand fast as a brazen wall, as a defended city, and as an iron pillar, in God's eternal truth. Thus, then, "be you steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." You Wesleyans say, Ah, you high doctrine men, you can't face that last verse of the 9th chapter of First Corinthians. Well you see I have faced it this morning; and I am very anxious you should understand it clearly; I hope I have made it clear. If I have not, just drop me a note, and tell me wherein I have come short, and I will try to make it clearer still, if I have not made it clear. Bless the Lord, then, while we know the necessity of continuing in the truth, we know, on the other hand, that the Lord alone can keep us therein. How different is this account of ourselves from the account men give of us! Ah, you get, say they, a high doctrine creed into your head, and that's all you care about. What a mercy you are not our judge, sir! what a mercy! What a mercy! We assure you it is a very small thing with us that we should be judged of man's judgment, and especially the judgment of a Pharisee and a carnal man. The natural man "discerns not the things of the Spirit." We need, seeing there are so many things to move us from the hope of the gospel, worldly interest, and worldly attractions, and worldly compulsion, and the evils of our nature, and ten thousand things to move and try us, we need, therefore, rebuke, reproof, chastening, exhortation, invitation expostulation; we need all that care that the Lord has taken of us, and will take of us, and does.

I will close by reminding you of the sweet assurances in the Lord's blessed word, that if we have the experience of the apostle, if we feel the awfulness of proving to be an apostate at the last, and if we have a desire to continue in the faith, with a good conscience, and whatever earthly hopes we may be parted from, we shall find in the hope of the gospel a substitute for all we shall have to give up that is visible to the mortal eye. Now the foundation of our safety seems to stand in that described in the 16th Psalm. The Savior says, "I have set the Lord always before me; I shall not be moved." Bless his holy name! he stood fast, and therefore as he stood fast to all that belonged to the nation with which he stood; he becomes our security. Then, again, are you heavily burdened? Are you sinking almost into despair, and saying, "My hope and my strength are perished from the Lord?" Ah, but then you are a believer, and if you are a believer, you are reckoned righteous, justified by faith. Unto such the Lord says, "Cast your burden upon the Lord." Ah, the burden of your sins, when the Lord shall enable you; the burden of afflictions, the burden of reproach that may come upon you, the burden of bereavement, the burden of family care, the burden of worldly care, the burden of church care, whatever it be, whether it be the fear of death, cast your burden upon the Lord, he will sustain you. He will never suffer the righteous to be moved; no, no, no, no; bless his holy name! Do not say the righteous themselves can stand fast if they like. That's a doctrine I hate with all my soul. But he will never suffer the righteous to be moved; never suffer

his believing children to become unbelieving, will never suffer his friends to become enemies, never suffer the soul that is settled down with him to become unsettled. "Forever, O Lord, your word is settled in heaven," and our souls are settled in the same forever. Again, are you saying, Well, I don't know, I am very dead; don't have so much life as I could wish? Well, it says, "He holds our soul in life, and suffers not our feet to be moved." How does he hold our soul in life? By holding us in the faith; that's it. "Kept by the power of God through faith." He thus holds our soul in life and suffers not our feet to be moved. Again, do you look to the hills, whence comes your help? Yes, to Jerusalem, the new Jerusalem, the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. My help comes from the Lord, that made the old heavens and the old earth; and the same God has made the new heavens and the new earth, and my help comes from him. Say you so? He will never suffer your foot to be moved. If you have taken that standing, if that be your faith, that be your hope, that be your love, that be your decision, he will not suffer your foot to be moved; he will preserve you from all fatal or ultimate evil; he will preserve your soul, preserve you're going out and your coming in from this time forth and for evermore. One more scripture upon this subject of not being moved away from the hope of the gospel. And I trust we can say with the disciples, when the Savior said, "Will you also go away?" Lord, our answer is, we once had no will to come; and as we once had no will to come, and none but your blessed self could give us a real effectual will to come, so now we have no will to go away, and none but your blessed self can make us willing to go away (and that he will never); such he has blessed, and does bless, and it cannot be reversed. So that once we had no will to come, now we have no will to go away; and if there be a willing mind towards God, it is accepted according to what a man has, not according to what a man has not. The apostle Paul looked round at the world, and almost as though someone was whispering in his ear, "Paul, where do you mean to retire? Where are you going to end your days? Where do you mean to build your house? On what mountain? In what valley? In what village? Are you not going to look over the tombstones in different parts, and see which have the longest lives on them? Where are you going to settle? You will settle somewhere, I suppose." Well, he says, My answer is simply this, that the Holy Ghost witness's that in every place afflictions await me. Well, that is very trying. It is rather trying to flesh and blood; but just so it is. Ah, how would you like that, some of you? Well, say you, I should stand if I had the same grace. True, that is very proper; glad you gave such a good answer as that. Well, it is very discouraging, Paul: look all round, look where he may. "But none of these things move me." No. If these things could move me, and turn me into an apostate, where should I be at the last? "But none of these things move me." I hope and trust you can say the same, friends. Look at his anchorage. "Neither count I my life dear unto myself." His life was very dear to others; they wept most of all for the saying, when he said, "You shall see my face no more."